

**EUROPEAN UNION****OSCE Permanent Council No 1160****Vienna, 12 October 2017**

EU statement on “Russia’s Ongoing Aggression Against Ukraine and Illegal Annexation of Crimea”

Mr. Chairperson, today we have listened to the address by the Vice-President of the ICRC, Ms. Christine Beerli. It should remind all of us that it is the civilian population in Ukraine who continues to bear the sufferings caused by the conflict in eastern Ukraine. Ongoing hostilities continue to pose a severe threat to civilians, many are experiencing poor living conditions and large numbers are dependent on food parcels and cash assistance to cover their basic needs. We once again call on all sides to ensure full humanitarian access in line with international humanitarian principles.

The last weeks have continued to see civilian casualties. SMM aerial imagery continues to disclose large numbers of heavy weapons, contrary to the Minsk agreements, primarily in areas held by Russian-backed separatists. During the last week of September alone more than 150 tanks, together with 34 howitzers and 73 military-type armoured vehicles, were revealed in separatist-held areas. This trend that has developed parallel to the drop in ceasefire violations is alarming. It adds to the general volatility along the line of contact and poses a severe threat to civilian lives and properties.

We thus remain firm in our call on all sides to swiftly and fully implement the Minsk agreements and honour their commitments in full in order to achieve a sustainable political solution in line with OSCE principles and commitments. Respect for these fundamental principles must be restored. We welcome the prolongation of the Law on Special Status. We call on Russia to fully assume its responsibility and to use its considerable influence over the separatists it backs to meet the Minsk commitments in full. We again call on Russia to immediately stop providing financial and military support to the separatists, and we remain deeply

concerned about information on the presence of Russian military equipment and personnel in separatist-held areas. The duration of the European Union's economic sanctions against Russia is linked to the complete implementation of the Minsk agreements. We remind all participating states once again that the mandate of the SMM allows for unimpeded access throughout Ukraine, including along the Ukrainian-Russian border and Crimea.

We remain concerned that despite SMM's repeated calls on the sides to ensure its safe and secure access and movement throughout the country, the monitors continue to face significant access restrictions particularly in separatist-held areas. We are deeply concerned by SMM reporting of the use of a laser to disable the SMM camera in a non-government-controlled area south of Stanytsia Luhanska. Such interference with the equipment of the mission is unacceptable and must stop. We note the reassurances received by the SMM through the JCCC that the matter would be investigated and the perpetrator held to account.

The EU recalls its unwavering support to the sovereignty, territorial integrity, unity and independence of Ukraine within its internationally recognised borders, and calls upon Russia to do likewise. We urge Russia to recognise these fundamental principles that it has itself invoked many times and to contribute, by acts and public pronouncements, to stabilise the situation and reverse moves that contravene these principles. We reiterate our strong condemnation of the illegal annexation of Crimea and Sevastopol to the Russian Federation and we will not recognise it. The European Union will remain committed to fully implement its non-recognition policy, including through restrictive measures.

The Candidate Countries the FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA*, MONTENEGRO* and ALBANIA*, the Country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and Potential Candidate BOSNIA and HERZEGOVINA, and the EFTA countries ICELAND and NORWAY, members of the European Economic Area, as well as UKRAINE, the REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA and GEORGIA align themselves with this statement.

* The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Albania continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.